

Participants fly their kites during the International Kite Festival in Colombo yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

# Colombia's new president vows to 'defeat narco-terrorists'

**AFP,** *Cali*

Colombian President Abelardo de la Espriella vowed to restore order and eradicate "narco-terrorists" in a fiery first speech as leader on Friday.

The US-backed millionaire flew by helicopter to address soldiers in a military garrison after his inauguration in the southwestern city of Cali.

His mandate marks a sharp turn right for the Andean nation, with the 48-year-old keen to cozy up to Washington and come down hard on Colombia's patchwork of armed groups.

"There will be no room for maneuvers that undermine the stability of the nation," the president, who adopted a stiff military salute on the campaign trail, told hundreds of soldiers.

He pledged to "relentlessly defeat narco-terrorism," adding that "the option of dialogue is completely exhausted" -- a reference to the former administration's spluttering peace talks with guerrillas.

The first thing on his to-do list, he said, was to join US President Donald Trump's regional anti-cartel alliance known as Shield of the Americas.

The US leader now has an eager ally in Bogota, and the feeling appeared to be mutual late Friday, when the US State Department issued a release saying the Trump administration intends to work with Congress to announce "$1 billion in assistance as partof a security package to support" the new administration.

# US Senate confirms Trump's ex-lawyer as attorney general

**AFP,** *Washington*

The US Senate confirmed President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer Todd Blanche as attorney general early Saturday after Republican lawmakers shrugged off Democratic concerns over politicization of the Department of Justice.

Blanche, who has already been serving as the top US law enforcement officer in an acting capacity, represented Trump as his private attorney in several criminal trials before entering government.

The Senate, which Republicans narrowly control, confirmed him by 50 votes to 49. Republican senators Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski joined the Democrats in voting no, underlining the political sensitivity over the nomination.

Blanche said he was "deeply honored by the trust and confidence President Trump has placed in me to lead the Department of Justice."

"I am grateful to the Senate for staying late to complete this process. To the dedicated public servants of the Department of Justice, thank you for your work each day to uphold the law and keep our country safe," Blanche wrote on X.

Trump, who has upended US political norms by seeking to bring nominally independent government agencies under his increasingly direct control, calls Blanche a "star."

Democrats opposed Blanche from the beginning, accusing Trump of turning the Department of Justice into a political weapon.

"The attorney general is supposed to be the people's lawyer," Senator Dick Durbin, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said on Tuesday.

"Mr Blanche continues to operate as the president's personal lawyer, treating the Justice Department like a law firm serving one client -- the president."

There were doubts over whether the White House could persuade a handful of Republican holdouts, without whom even the narrow confirmation would have been impossible.

The main sticking point was an attempt to establish a $1.8 billion fund for what Trump calls victims of politicized prosecutions, likely including the rioters who stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 in an attempted insurrection to prevent Joe Biden from being certified as president, after he had defeated Trump in the 2020 election.

# New BTV DG

FROM PAGE 12

of the law being made effective. If it is not in effect, there is no scope to make an appointment under it."

"If the act has been made effective through the issuance of a gazette notification, then there is no problem with the appointment," he added.

According to Ministry of Information sources, BTV DGs are appointed on deputation from among government officials of joint secretary or additional secretary rank, or on a contractual basis from outside the government. For contractual appointments, media personalities or professionals are selected under the "Public Service Act, 2018". Ministry of Public Administration sources said Mahbubul Alam, who was appointed during the interim government, received a contractual appointment under the Public Service Act.

Asked why the new DG was appointed under an inactive law when contractual appointments are possible under the Public Service Act, Golam Robbani, deputy secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration who signed the appointment notification, declined to comment and requested that senior officials be contacted.

Contacted, Nilufar Jesmin Khan, joint secretary of the Contract and Foreign Employment Branch of the Ministry of Public Administration, said, "We are discussing the matter. Please speak to our wing chief for comments on this."

Despite phone calls and text messages, Aknur Rahman, head of the Appointment, Promotion and Deputation Wing, did not respond.

Asked how the appointment happened despite multiple stages of scrutiny for contractual appointments, a senior Cabinet Division official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "Officers with the skills and personality required to run the state should be appointed to public administration. Otherwise, such problems will keep occurring."

"A few days ago, a retired officer was promoted from deputy secretary to joint secretary. This is the state of the Ministry of Public Administration," the official said, citing an example.

# India can't play Hasina

FROM PAGE 12

the Fall of the Fascist Government", organised by Sada Dal (White Panel), a pro-BNP teachers' organisation at Dhaka University, and the University Teachers' Association of Bangladesh (UTAB), marking the second anniversary of the July mass uprising.

He said Bangladesh wants friendly ties with India based on mutual respect.

"We want to maintain a friendly relationship with you. But we will never become the Awami League. We will maintain relations with you while upholding Bangladesh's interests, based on mutual dignity and respect and based on sovereignty and equality," he said.

On August 5, the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia hosted a press conference in New Delhi where Hasina, her son Sajeeb Wazed Joy and other AL leaders spoke. The event was broadcast live on social media. Hasina reiterated her plan to return to Bangladesh in December this year.

Dhaka had earlier requested New Delhi to prevent Hasina from speaking at the event, saying it could affect bilateral relations.

On August 7, India's Ministry of External Affairs said the Indian government had no role in the event organised by a private media entity. It also said the government did not endorse anything said at the forum, "especially with regard to the duly constituted government of Bangladesh".

Referring to India's statement, Salahuddin said Bangladesh accepted the clarification but objected to Hasina being repeatedly allowed to speak to international media from India.

He rejected comparisons between Hasina's presence in India and BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman's political activities while in London.

Noting that Hasina has neither expressed remorse nor apologised to the people for the atrocities committed during the July uprising, Salahuddin questioned whether she could still be regarded as a democratic leader. He also alleged that Hasina was using her stay in India to make statements against Bangladesh's democratic process and create instability.

"The statements she is making from Delhi are against our democratic culture and the people of this country, and they are attempts to create instability -- these are our allegations. India cannot avoid responsibility for this," he said.

Turning to the interim government and its reform process, Salahuddin said some quarters had advocated extending its tenure for another five years, ignoring people's aspirations for a fair election and the transfer of power through a democratic process.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi called for institutional and constitutional reforms and a change in the mindset of political leaders.

He said no single group could claim sole credit for the July uprising and noted that 142 Chhatra Dal leaders and activists were martyred during the movement.

Referring to a recent documentary screening at the official residence of Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman, Rizvi alleged that although the documentary mentioned Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, it did not mention former president Ziaur Rahman as the proclaimer of independence.

Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof ABM Obaidul Islam said free thinking was obstructed on the campus during what he described as the fascist era.

DU Prof Md Mohiuddin moderated the event, chaired by UTAB Secretary General Prof Morshed Hasan Khan.

# Small changes key

FROM PAGE 3

was Bangladesh's greatest strength. However, young people seeking systemic change must build alliances with other sections of society, as resistance to change remained strong.

Stressing decentralisation, he said farmers, women, entrepreneurs and ordinary people across the country should also be seen as agents of change, rather than viewing change as centred only on Dhaka and political leaders.

Citing education and health, he said forming an education commission alone would not transform the education system. Reforms were also needed in areas such as appointing vice-chancellors and ensuring education quality.

Similarly, small but important reforms were needed to make primary healthcare a pillar of the health system, he added.

He also urged people not to view young Bangladeshis' migration abroad negatively, saying they could not be blamed for leaving when adequate opportunities were unavailable at home.

Many, he added, want to return and contribute to the country. "The main question is whether we can create that environment."

He said reform was needed not only in state institutions but also in individual behaviour, citing traffic-rule violations and a lack of respect for women despite laws and public discussions on road safety and gender justice.

Speaking during the panel discussion, Alternatives organiser Tasnuva Zabeen said the July uprising had moved Bangladesh 10 to 15 years forward.

People can now speak out against decisions more freely, while political groups and civil society actors are raising their voices together, she said, calling for greater opportunities for women to enter politics.

Chairing the discussion, Supreme Court lawyer MM Khalequzzaman said systemic change was the long-term objective of the July uprising.

"We have long seen the 'politics of narrative'. Now we want to see the 'politics of performance'," he said.

He called for an autonomous judiciary free from executive control, a separate judicial secretariat and a review of laws from the British and Pakistani periods that are unnecessary or inconsistent with human rights.

Muneem Mobasher, co-founder of Bengal Institute of Peace and Economic Development, also spoke, among others.

# Indian

FROM PAGE 3

memories and photos of the anti-Modi movement have also been taken down," he said.

Asked by journalists, he said the BNP might be afraid of India. "If they weren't afraid, why would something that is a part of history be excluded?" he questioned.

He alleged that the current government had changed the museum's original plans.

Nahid further claimed that the museum's current state disproportionately highlights oppression faced by the BNP as a party, increasing its partisan narratives and statements.

The sections highlighting the July uprising should be more elaborate and follow a timeline, he said. "In particular, the roles of private university and madrasa students should be highlighted separately, which is missing [in the museum]."

He said there were similar stories of torture, brutality and resistance at various universities outside Dhaka and in different districts, but those aspects had not been included.

NCP lawmakers Akhter Hossen, Abdullah Al Amin and Nusrat Tabassum, among others, accompanied Nahid during the visit.

**PRAYER TIMING**
**AUGUST 9**

| | Fazr | Zohr | Asr | Maghrib | Esha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AZAN | 4-20 | 12-45 | 5-00 | 6-47 | 8-15 |
| JAMAAT | 4-55 | 1-15 | 5-15 | 6-50 | 8-45 |

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

# Pvt fuel imports

FROM PAGE 3

financial capacity, which only a few major groups possess.

He also rejected criticism of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), saying it made profits of Tk 3,943 crore in FY2023-24 and Tk 2,050 crore in FY2024-25, after losses in the previous two fiscal years.

Porwar expressed concern over the government's decision to reduce the tendering period for refined fuel imports for September-December this year from 42 days to 10 days.

He warned that the shorter window could discourage international suppliers, reduce competition and create opportunities for syndicates.

He also questioned private-sector control of fuel, a strategic commodity vital to agriculture, power generation, transport, aviation and national security.

Jamaat demanded an immediate halt to the proposed policy, publication of all related documents and at least 60 days of public consultation.

The party also called for BPC reforms, including an independent audit, professional appointments to its board, mandatory e-GP procurement and quarterly disclosure of fuel import prices and volumes.

It demanded faster implementation of Eastern Refinery's second unit, increased strategic fuel storage and withdrawal of proposals to curtail legal protection for fuel-sector workers.

Porwar said Jamaat was not opposed to private investment but opposed transferring public resources without accountability.

# Nine killed in road

FROM PAGE 3

Bridge West Zone Police Station.

One of the deceased was identified as Md Monsur Ali, 26, of Bogura.

In Kishoreganj, two people were killed and two others injured when a passenger bus hit an auto-rickshaw at Boratia intersection in Pakundia municipality around 7:30am.

One of the deceased was identified as Selim Mia, 35.

OC SM Arifur Rahman of Pakundia Police Station said police seized the bus but its driver fled the scene.

In Thakurgaon, two persons were killed and another was injured as a motorcycle hit a pedestrian before crashing into an electric pole in the afternoon on the Thakurgaon-Baliadangi Road near Nengri Bazar in Sadar upazila.

The deceased are pedestrian Abul Hossain, 60, and motorcycle's pillion rider Arnab Islam, 13.

Md Likhon Hossain, a sub-inspector of Thakurgaon Police Station, filing of a case was underway, the SI said.

# EC plans phased local polls

FROM PAGE 3

Meanwhile, LGRD Minister Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir on July 22 said local government elections were likely to be held by the end of this year or early 2027.

According to the roadmap, polls in the haor and northeastern areas -- Sunamganj, Netrokona, Kishoreganj and parts of Habiganj -- will be held between September and November, when water transport is easier.

Masud said the roadmap also covers training for EC officials, voter list preparation, ink stocks, appointment of presiding officers and voter awareness campaigns.

The roadmap states that November to February has been marked suitable for polls in the hill and coastal belt -- Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagrachhari, Cox's Bazar and islands such as Hatiya and Sandwip, as well as parts of Barishal -- as the monsoon brings risks of landslides, heavy rain and tidal surges.

For riverine and char districts -- Kurigram, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Munshiganj, Shariatpur, Chandpur and Rajbari -- September to March has been set to avoid floods and erosion.

In the plains and urban centres -- all other divisions, districts, upazilas, municipalities and city corporations -- polls can be held any time outside the monsoon.

The workplan highlights challenges in phased polls, noting that short gaps in past elections led to clashes over nominations, scrutiny, appeals, symbol allocation, training of officials and ballot transport. Limited intervals also strained law enforcement as personnel had to move rapidly between areas.

As part of preparations, the EC has drafted codes of conduct for five tiers of local government and sought opinions from political parties.

On July 21, the commission finalised the rules with recommendations, such as including the armed forces in the definition of law enforcement agencies and disqualifying MPO-listed teachers, dual citizens, loan defaulters and guarantors from contesting local polls.

On July 7, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin directed the swift finalisation of the code of conduct and election management manuals. According to the roadmap, rule-making is to be completed by August 15.

Masud said, "We will send it to the law ministry very soon. Work is also underway on the election management rules."

He also confirmed that local government polls would have domestic observers only, as foreign observers would be too costly.

He said BG Press had estimated Tk 41 crore for printing voter lists.

Bangladesh has 13 city corporations, 500 upazila parishads, 61 zila parishads and 4,580 union parishads, but no local government elections have been held in more than two years.

The Local Government Division removed 323 mayors and 323 councillors in August and September 2024, following the political changeover. It also removed 493 upazila chairmen and 494 vice chairmen, including female vice chairmen, in August 2024.

Among all these local bodies, 108 union parishads and 10 municipalities remain ineligible due to delimitation, voter list complications, and legal disputes. The rest are eligible for the elections, according to the workplan.

On July 9, the EC sought information from the LGD on the number of local government bodies eligible to go to polls.

It asked the LGD to respond by July 31, but EC officials said they had not received a reply.

Asked about the update, LGD Secretary Shahidul Hassan yesterday declined to provide specific details on the scheduling or formal communication for upcoming local government elections.

Asked whether the LGD would issue a letter to the EC for conducting local polls, he said, "Naturally, it should be given according to the rules."

Asked when such a letter might be sent, he said, "I can't say. It will be done when the government makes a decision."

# Hafizur held

FROM PAGE 12

Justice Md Rezaul Haque suspended Hafizur's bail until August 9 and ordered him to surrender within 24 hours.

The court also ordered law enforcement agencies to arrest him if he failed to surrender within the stipulated time.

PBI first arrested Hafizur from Keraniganj on the night of April 21 this year.